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## Marginal Notes in South Slavic Written Culture

### Between Practising Memory and Accounting for the Self

*Les notes marginales dans la culture écrite des Slaves du sud, entre pratique de  
la mémoire et récit de soi*

**Konrad Petrovsky**

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## MARGINAL NOTES IN SOUTH SLAVIC WRITTEN CULTURE

### Between Practising Memory and Accounting for the Self

The marginal note, like a pun, or like a manuscript found in a bottle, offers the reader a kind of puzzle; divorced from the context that first stimulated it, it renders no more than a fragmentary clue to buried possibilities of meaning.<sup>1</sup>

[...] mais il est difficile d'insérer ce matériau historique extraordinairement fragmenté dans une narration suivie. Ces petits graviers d'information sont trop décontextualisés, trop autonomes pour bien servir à l'historien; ces gisements restent donc sous-exploités.<sup>2</sup>

#### I. Introduction

In January 1580, after completing the transcription of a *Prolog* (an abridged collection of Lives of Saints), the monk Visarion decided to incorporate his achievement in a series of contemporary events he considered worthy of mention (citation 1):

And all of this was written in the time of the blessed abbot Pankratije and the venerable Zaharije, and all the brothers in Christ, in the Temple of the fleshless and heavenly powers of the archangels Michael and Gabriel and of the other heavenly powers, in the Monastery of Kumanica, near the place of Nikolje Pazar on the river Lim, in 7088 [i.e. 1580]. This year, there was a big flood in the time of Christmas Fasting; the Lim rose high and swept away all the bridges, the ones of Nikolje, Brodarevo and many others as well as half of the cloister garden. And

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1. Lawrence Lipking, "The Marginal Gloss," *Critical Inquiry*, 3, 4 (Summer 1977): 609-655, 610.

2. Bernard Lory, "Review of Nadja Manolova-Nikolova, Penka Želeva, eds., *Letopisni beležki ot Sredna Zapadna Bălgarija*, [Annalistic notes from Central West Bulgaria]," *Balkanologie* [online], 8, 1 (June 2004), URL : <http://balkanologie.revues.org/2082> (accessed 10.10.2017).

all the fruit trees along the riverside were swept away with their roots. This year hoarfrost covered all the vineyards in the country except the ones along the shore. And that was the time when the apostate Mehmed Pasha returned to the Law. The transcription of this book began on the first of October and ended on the eighth of January. And this I do not state for the attainment of great wealth, but by virtue of the desire for spiritual and corporal redemption [...]  
And this holy and adorable book was manufactured by the ever-sinful, feeble, laggard, lazy and dusty servant of Christ and by the least among monks, the hieromonk Visarion, to whom the fatherland is the grave, the earth is the mother, and the worms are the fortune [...].<sup>3</sup>

These lines, taken from a colophon on the final pages of a liturgical book written in the Sandžak of Novi Pazar, offer remarkable insights into a scribe's reality. Visarion obviously intended to inscribe his praiseworthy achievement (the copying of a holy book under the spiritual guidance of his superiors and the monastery's holy patrons) into the unforeseeable flow of time and to synchronize it with other temporal incidents such as natural disasters affecting the community life but also distant political events deemed important like the death of Mehmed Pasha Sokollu (1505-1579).<sup>4</sup>

Yet unlike Visarion's colophon, which is annexed at the end of the book and formulated in a quite coherent manner, the great bulk of marginal notes to be found reveal a rather disjointed character. Such is the case with the series of notes jotted down by the hieromonk Roman from Western Bulgaria commenting on his copying work (citation 2):

While I was writing this, an older monk came and brought me a nice mug of wine and I had a few drinks, God forgive me.  
Oh, lousy paper!<sup>5</sup>

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3. "[...] и сїе писа се при блаженїемъ старцѣ панкратїю іеромонахѣ и захарїи іеримонахѣ и всєи еже въ хѣтъ братїи въ храмѣ сѣиѣхъ бесплѣтнѣхъ и нбснѣхъ силѣ архїстратыга мїхїаїла и гавріїла и прочїихъ бесплѣтнѣхъ силѣ монастырь глїемїи кѣманица блязѣ мѣста нїколя пазарѣ на рѣцѣхъ лїмѣхъ ѿ быгїа въ лѣто 7311. И въ то лѣто выѣ наводненїе силно въ начелѣ поста рожъ хѣва и донде лїм силнѣ и всєе мостовѣ ѿнесе нїколаскы, броддревскыи и нїе мнѣге, и поль врьта монастырскаго и чѣто выѣ ѿвоцила садовїа при врьзѣхъ лїмѣхъ всєе то ѿнесе и сѣ коренїемѣ, и въ то лѣто оубѣ слана винограда въ по всѣмъ землїи кромѣ поморїа и тогда поворачи се законѣхъ прѣвѣстїи нїкѣ мѣхмедъ паша. – почѣ се сїа книга писати мѣца вѣк. 4. и сѣвршїи се ген. 11. И не сѣпише сїе ѿ мнѣга богатства нѣкоєга лѣвѣщааго, нѣ ѿ мнѣга оусердїа сїенїа ради дїшевнаго и тѣлеснаго [...] – сїю сѣоу бжѣственнѣю книгѣ рѣководїа мнѣгобшїи и оуїналы и кѣсїи и лѣнїви и прѣстїи рабѣ хѣбѣ и маїшїи въ нїмѣхъ вїсарїїи іеромонахъ емѣжъ ѿчѣство грѣбъ землїа мїти чрѣвѣе богатство." Бранко Л. Цвијетић, "Записи у цркви Св. Николе у Никлѣцу код Бјелог Поља [Branko L. Cvijetiћ, Inscriptions from the church of St Nicholas in Nikolac near Bjelo Polje]," *Зборник за историју јужне Србије из суседних области*, 1 (1936): 223-250, 245 seq.

4. On the famous Christian-born vizir, see Gilles Veinstein, "Sokollu Mehmed Pasha," in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition Online ([http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_7090](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7090), accessed 10.10.2017).

5. Боряна Христова, Даринка Караджова, Елена Узунова, eds., *Бележки на българските книжовници X-XVIII век. Т. 2: XVI-XVIII век* [Boriana Khristova, Darinka Karadzova, Elena Uzunova, eds., *Marginal notes by Bulgarian scribes 10-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, vol. 2: 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries*] (Sofia: Natsionalna biblioteka "Sv.Sv. Kiril i Metodii", 2004), no. 335, 64: "(2) Сїю азъ

While in both of these examples the notes are easily attributable to a specific person who, moreover, is the book's scribe himself, in most cases we are confronted with no more than fragments or scraps of information such as the wailing of a certain Rafail in the margins of the *Homilies of Ephraim the Syrian* (citation 3):

Woe is me! Sinful me, how much grief assails me, the wretched Rafail in the year 7135 [i.e. 1627].<sup>6</sup>

Scholars of manuscripts are well acquainted with these kinds of scribal inscriptions that abound in medieval and even more so in early modern writings up to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through them, past realities the individual meanings of which are only hard to fathom from other sources become surprisingly palpable—by revealing to us, for instance, how the death of Mehmed Pasha Sokollu was perceived in his area of origin (citation 1), by sharing with us the profane experiences of scriptorial work (citation 2), or by expressing the personal grief of someone whose identity remains undisclosed (citation 3). Since for large parts of Ottoman Southeast Europe scribes rarely ventured beyond highly standardized, traditional forms of writing, marginalia, colophons, inscription and other minor text forms have been regarded as a valuable supplement to the shortcomings of conventional written sources, and more specifically, to the paucity of narrative sources. And still, in the historian's eyes their usefulness seems to be too limited for them to be considered more than just a conjectural, ancillary type of source in mainstream research.

As an overview of the state of research in the first part of my article (II) will show, the main reason for this is, paradoxically enough, not a lack of interest but rather a series of misconceptions regarding their value as sources. In order to demonstrate that there is more to them than just the discreet charm of occasional insights or anecdotal evidence, and thus, to fully assess their potential as historical sources, I will suggest (III) an interpretive framework that takes the *practice of taking notes* rather than their subject contents as a starting point. By way of comparing marginalia with commemoration lists (IV), their specifically liminal status will be revealed—as part of the book and at the same time transcending it, both text and context, between pious account and historical (self-)narrative. Thus, as I will argue in the final part (V), only by combining the material with the media aspects of production, their value as historical source for the study of the 17<sup>th</sup> century can be fully assessed, a period when the taking of marginal notes was on the rise throughout the South Slavic area of the Balkans.

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пием приде старць нѣки и принѣ винѣ двѣрѣ ѿѧ и напй се довиѣно бѣ да прѣ. (3) Ѡ злѧ хратіѧ (sic!).” The copied book is, again, a *Prolog* and was finished in 1694 as we learn from the same note which I do not cite here in its entirety.

6. According to the catalogue description by Бенѣ Цонев, *Опис на ръкописитѣ и старопечатните книги на Народната Библиотека в София* [Ben'о Tsonev, Catalogue of manuscripts and old print books of the National Library in Sofia], vol. I (Sofia: Dărzhavna pechatnitsa, 1910), no. 299, 232: “Ѡ кнѣ грѣшномѣ многа печѧль наидѣ на ме ѡкаѧного рафѧила къ лѣ 7135 [1735 = 1627 AD].”

## II. The study of marginalia — between positivism and romanticism

Without a doubt, the study of minor textual remnants already has a certain tradition in Southeast Europe ranging back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the first specialised collections of annotations and inscriptions, including both palaeographic and epigraphic material, were established. At this time cultural heritage preservation was introduced as part of the national agenda of the still young states in Southeast Europe and national book collections started to be systematically registered, described, and edited. Thus, as a corollary to a huge number of editions under his purview, the Serbian historian and philologist Ljubomir Stojanović published the major collection of “Old Serbian notes and inscriptions” from 1902 to 1926, whose six impressive volumes comprise more than 10,500 entries from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>7</sup> *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi* was the first of its kind and therefore the standard model for all ensuing editions. Of course it contains numerous flaws, mostly due to the fact that Stojanović often relied on other editions and second-hand information and only rarely consulted the original sources himself. Also, he reproduced the material with minimal care for its origin and context.<sup>8</sup> Despite these shortcomings the gigantic collection established by the Serbian scholar, still unrivalled in its material coverage and ambition, has managed to open up a whole field of research possibilities and questions. Following its publication, *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi* has been completed and partially replaced by more reliable and technically more advanced editions of marginalia. While some of them can be considered continuations with a narrower regional or temporal focus,<sup>9</sup> others are designed to cover parts of Southeast Europe only partially considered

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7. Љубомир Стојановић, ed., *Стари српски записи и натписи* [Ljubomir Stojanović, ed., Old Serbian marginal notes and inscriptions], 6 vols. (Belgrade: Srpska Kraljevska Akademija, 1902-1926). The reprint edition (Belgrade 1982-1986) provides numerous bibliographical addenda, corrections and references to manuscript catalogues for each volume and is therefore indispensable for future work with the material.

8. Thus, epigraphic material is edited on the same principles which leads to the complete neglect of the material or the visual aspect so necessary for its understanding.

9. For additions and corrections to the Stojanović edition, see Владимир Петковић, ed., *Старине: Записи, натписи, листине* [Vladimir Petković, ed., Monuments: marginal notes, inscriptions, charters] (Belgrade: Izdavačka knjižnica “Napredak”, 1923); Владимир Ђоровић, ed., *Стари српски записи и натписи* [Vladimir Đorović, ed., Old Serbian marginal notes and inscriptions] (Belgrade: Pešić i sinovi, 1997). With a regional focus, see the first and only volume of the *Зборник за историју јужне Србије и суседних области* from 1936, containing a rich collection of marginalia and inscriptions from Southern Serbia; on Vojvodina, see Петар Момировић, ed., *Стари српски записи и натписи из Војводине* [Petar Momirović, ed., Old Serbian marginal notes and inscriptions from Vojvodina], 6 vols. (Novi Sad: Matica srpska 1993), comprising more than 10,000 entries from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; Ђорѓи Поп-Атанасов, ed., *Стари записи* [Đorđi Pop-Atanasov, ed., Old marginal notes] (Skopje: Menora, 1996), with a focus on Macedonia drawing most of its material from Stojanović, as is also the case with the two popularizing anthologies, Милорад Павић, ed., *Стари српски записи и натписи* [Milorad Pavić, ed., Old Serbian marginal notes and inscriptions] (Belgrade: Prosveta 1986) and Надежда Р. Синдик, ed., *Издавачи, итампари, преписивачи* [Nadezhda R. Sindik, ed., Editors, printers and copyists] (Cetinje: Obod, 1996).

by Stojanović.<sup>10</sup> Needless to say, as selection criteria have been subject to change and as new manuscripts continue to appear, none of these editorial projects can be regarded as completed or exhaustive. Nor are they satisfactorily defined in geographic or linguistic terms when it comes to the cultural area they intend to treat. Given the changing and overlapping boundaries of the different varieties of Slavonic covering an area stretching roughly from the Dalmatian hinterland to the Bucovina monasteries and from Northern Pannonia to Thrace, and due to the fact that manuscripts as well as their scribes were frequently on the move, common labels such as “Bulgarian,” “Macedonian,” “Serbian,” or “Romanian marginal,” apart from making questionable political claims, denote nothing more than the present location of the manuscripts included in the respective edition.<sup>11</sup> The survey of existing editions also shows a strikingly uneven distribution; while there are many editions dedicated exclusively to the collections of marginal notes from the South Slavic linguistic area, there are only very few specialised editions of marginalia written in Romanian or Greek.<sup>12</sup> This is already an indication (to be elaborated on below) of the differing importance attributed to these sources in the historiographies of the region.

Given the variety of editorial efforts since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it certainly comes as a surprise that the wealth of data provided by these materials is not used in a more systematic and methodologically aware manner in the study of Ottoman Southeast Europe. There are, of course, notable exceptions such as palaeographical research that highly depends on scrutinising colophons and marginalia in order to determine central aspects of manuscript production and dissemination.<sup>13</sup>

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10. For Bulgaria see Иван Гошев, “Стари записки и надписи [Ivan Goshev, Old marginal notes and inscriptions],” in: *Годишник на Софийския Университет. Богословски Факултет*, 4 (1927): 335-378; 6 (1929): 1-36; 12 (1935), 1-50; 13 (1936), 1-58; 14 (1937), 1-50; Йордан Иванов, ed., *Български старини из Македония* [Iordan Ivanov, Bulgarian monuments from Macedonia] (Sofia: Dǎrzhavna Pechatnitsa, 1931, reprint Sofia: Nauka i izskustvo 1970): 1-279; Венцеслав Начев, Никола Ферманджиев, eds., *Писахме да се знае* [Ventseslav Nachev, Nikola Fermandzhiev, We wrote to let others know] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Otechestvenia front, 1984); Христова, Караджова, Узунова, eds., *Бележки на българските книжовници*.

11. Since more specific information about the wider context (concerning the type of manuscript, its origin and locations) is usually only rudimentarily provided in editions of marginalia, it is always useful to consult the relevant manuscript catalogue.

12. Gabriel Ștrempel, *Copiști de manuscrise românești până la 1800* [Copyists of Romanian manuscripts until 1800], Vol. I (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RPR, 1959) of which only one volume was published; Ilie Corfus, *Însemnări de demult* [Notes of bygone days] (Iași: Junimea, 1975); Ioan Caproșu and Elena Chiaburu, eds., *Însemnări de pe manuscrise și cărți vechi din Țara Moldovei* [Marginal notes on manuscripts and old books from Moldavia], 4 vols. (Iași: Casa Editorială “Demiurg”, 2008-2009), the first edition of its kind on primarily Romanian material, comprising notes from the early 15<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. To my knowledge, there has been no attempt at establishing a separate comprehensive corpus of Greek marginal writings since Σπυρίδων Π. Λάμπρος, “Ενθυμήσεων, ἤτοι χρονικῶν σημειωμάτων συλλογή [Spyridon P. Lampros, Collection of mementos or annalistic notes],” *Νέος Ἑλληνομνημῶν*, 7/2-3 (1910): 113-312, and 16/4 (1922): 407-420.

13. Specialized collections with this focus have a certain tradition in (Post-)Byzantine studies, starting with idem, “Ἀθηναῖοι βιβλιογράφοι καὶ κτήτορες κωδίκων: κατὰ τοὺς μέσους αἰῶνας καὶ ἐπὶ τουρκοκρατίας [Athenian writers and donors of codices: From the Middle Ages until

Besides codicological and other economic and religious aspects related to book culture,<sup>14</sup> colophons and marginal notes have been occasionally drawn upon for the study of natural phenomena (and of the popular beliefs associated with them)<sup>15</sup> and, only quite recently, for the study of power relations.<sup>16</sup> Albeit this goes beyond

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the Turkish rule],” *Επετηρίς τοῦ Φιλολογικοῦ Συλλόγου “Παρνασσός,”* 6 (1902): 159-218, and idem, *Ἑλληνίδες βιβλιογράφοι καὶ κυρίαὶ κωδίκων κατὰ τοὺς μέσους αἰῶνας καὶ ἐπὶ Τουρκοκρατίας* [Female Greek writers and owners of manuscripts from the Middle Ages until the Turkish rule] (Athens: Ek tou Typografeiou P.D. Sakellariou, 1905). See now Σωτήρης Ν. Καδᾶς, “Σημειώματα χειρογράφων τῶν μονῶν τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους. Μονὴ Ξηροποτάμου [Sotiris N. Kadas, Marginal notes on manuscripts from the monasteries of Mount Athos. Monastery of Xeropotamou],” *Βυζαντινά,* 14 (1988): 307-390; Idem, “Τὰ σημειώματα τῶν χειρογράφων τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους. Μονὴ Ξενοφόντος [The marginal notes on manuscripts from Mount Athos. The monastery of Xenophontos],” *Βυζαντινά,* 15 (1989): 429-470; Idem, “Τὰ σημειώματα τῶν χειρογράφων τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους. Μονὴ Σιμωνος Πέτρας [The marginal notes on manuscripts from Mount Athos. Monastery of Simonopetras],” *Βυζαντινά,* 16 (1991): 263-302; Idem, “Τὰ σημειώματα τῶν χειρογράφων τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους. Μονὴ Ζωγράφου [The marginal notes on manuscripts from Mount Athos. The monastery of Zographou],” *Βυζαντινά,* 17 (1994): 141-176; Idem, *Τὰ σημειώματα τῶν χειρογράφων τῆς Μονῆς Διονυσίου Ἁγίου Ὄρους* [The marginal notes on manuscripts from the monastery of Dionysiou on Mount Athos], (Mount Athos: I.M. Ἀγίου Διονυσίου, 1996); Idem, *Τὰ σημειώματα τῶν χειρογράφων τῆς Ἱεράς Μεγίστης Μονῆς Βατοπαίδιου* [The marginal notes on manuscripts from the Saint and Great Monastery of Vatopedi] (Mount Athos: I.M. Βατοπαίδιου, 2000). Worth mentioning is also the database of marginal notes hosted by the University of Athens Σημειώματα-Κώδικες: <http://simeiomata-kodikon.arch.uoa.gr/index.php/site/index>.

14. For exemplary studies based on annotations, the following may be mentioned: Kurt Treu, “Griechische Schreibermotizen als Quelle für politische, soziale und kulturelle Verhältnisse ihrer Zeit,” *Byzantinobulgarica,* 2 (1966): 127-143; Paolo Odorico, “‘Alia nullius momenti...’ A proposito della letteratura dei *marginalia*,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 78 (1985): 23-36; Φλωρεντία Ευαγγελάτου-Νοταρά, *Χορηγοί – κήτορες – δωρητές σε σημειώματα κωδίκων. Παλαιολόγειοι χρόνοι* [Florentia Evangelatou-Notara, Sponsors, Donors, and Benefactors in Manuscript Notes from the Palaiologan Period] (Athens: Parousia 2000); Кети Мирчева, “За извороведската стойност на приписките и бележките с просветна информация (15-18 век) [Keti Mircheva, On the source value of annotations and marginal notes on education],” *Годишник на Национален музей на образованието,* 1 (1983): 69-87; Мая Бозукова, “Приписките в църковнославянските старопечатни книги като источник на сведения за съдбата на книгата [Maia Bozukova, Annotations in church Slavonic printings as a source of information about the fate of the books],” *Българска книга,* 1/12 (1992): 17-20; Дилиана Радославова, “Състав на българските книжовници преписвачи от XVIII век според запазените приписки [Dilyana Radoslavova, The social composition of Bulgarian scribes and copyists from the 17th century according to preserved annotations],” in Боряна Христова, Елена Узунова, eds., *Факти и мистификации в старите текстове* [Boriana Khristova, Elena Uzunova, eds., Facts and mystifications in the old texts] (Sofia: IK Gutenberg, 2012), 102-138; Alexandru Ofrim, *Cheia și psaltirea: imaginarul cărții în cultura tradițională românească* [Key and Psalter: The imagery of the book in traditional Romanian culture] (Pitești: Editura Paralela 45, 2001).

15. Rossitsa Gradeva, “Ottoman and Bulgarian Sources on Earthquakes in Central Balkan Lands (17th-18th century),” in Elisabeth Zachariadou, ed., *Natural Disasters in the Ottoman Empire* (Rethymnon: Crete University Press, 1999), 55-65, as well as other studies within this volume; Damaschin Mioc and Vasile Mioc, *Cronica observațiilor astronomice românești (istorie și astronomie)* [Chronicle of Romanian astronomic observations (history and astronomy)] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1977).

16. Мая Косева, “Приписките: живяна история, желана история. Приписките за османското нашествие като места на паметта [Maia Koseva, Colophons—lived history and desired history. Marginal notes about the Ottoman invasion as memory places],” in Христова, Узунова, eds., *Факти и мистификации,* 59-73; Radu G. Păun, “The ‘Barbarian’ Emperor: Thinking About Empire and Power Hierarchies During the Ottoman Era (Slavic Orthodox

the limits of this article, for the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries various attempts at using personal notes (left in books by their owners, readers or donors) as elements towards a history of modernity “from below” should be mentioned as well.<sup>17</sup>

It is true, however, that these fascinating research directions themselves prove to be marginal, which is to say, largely unnoticed by major debates in the historiographical field. For in mainstream historical research marginal notes have rarely passed the threshold of auxiliary evidence, serving either as linguistic testimonies (deemed particularly trustworthy sources for past linguistic habits but also for determining ethnic affiliation) or as pieces of corroborative evidence (in order to identify or to confirm the existence of people, places, and, mostly military, events). Interestingly enough, the overall positivist approach to information yielded by marginal notes, which of course is perfectly legitimate, is in many cases based on the underlying assumption that their particular value lies in the fact that they are a direct expression of the popular mind-set—a view routinely expressed since their discovery as historical source. It is the prevalence of this ultimately romanticising attitude towards marginal writings, which is just as old as their critical editing, that I consider the most serious obstacle to a more systematic take on marginalia.

Ever since leading historians from Southeast Europe attempted to draw their colleagues' attention to this type of source—Nicolae Iorga's programmatic essay “The Country's History through the Eyes of the Little Ones” being a prominent example<sup>18</sup>—their peculiar value has been defined by what all other sources of the

Lands, 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries),” in Robert Born and Andreas Puth, eds., *Osmanischer Orient und Ostmitteleuropa: Perzeptionen und Interaktionen in den Grenzregionen zwischen dem 16. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2014): 75-106.

17. Надя Манолова-Николова, Пенка Желева, eds., *Летописни бележки от Средна Западна България* [Nadia Manolova-Nikolova, Penka Zheleva, eds., *Annalistic notes from Central Western Bulgaria*] (Sofia: Lik, 1999), including material from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; Росица Кирилова, *Приписки в българските старопечатни книги: 1806-1878* [Rositsa Kirilova, *Annotations in old Bulgarian printed books: 1806-1878*] (Sofia: Natsionalna biblioteka “Sv. Sv. Kiril i Metodii,” 2013); Майя Бозукова, “Приписките в славянските кирилски печатни книги от XVIII век в Народната библиотека Св.св. Кирил и Методий [Maia Bozukova, *Annotations in Cyrillic Printed Books from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century from the National Library St. Cyril and Methodius*],” *Библиотекознание*, 3 (1993): 127-140 and 5 (1994), 80-92; Kristina Popova, “Die Einweihung der Kirche Sveti Dimităr und die Schlacht von Port Arthur. Zeit- und Raumbewusstsein in den Randglossen der Evangelien von Teshovo 1849-1927,” *Historische Anthropologie*, 3 (1995): 73-99; Иван Русев, *Сие Да Се Знае... Приписките и църковните текстове като извори за възрожденската история. По новооткрити материали от храмовете на Котленския край* [Ivan Rusev, *Let it be known... Marginal notes and church texts as sources for the history of the national renaissance period. Based on newly found material from the churches of the Kotel region*] (Sofia: Faber, 1999). See also Valeriu Leu, *Însemnări manuscrise pe cărți vechi românești din bisericile eparhiei Caransebeșului (sec. XIX)* [Handwritten notes in old Romanian books from churches of the Caransebeș diocese (19<sup>th</sup> century)] (Timișoara: Miron, 2011), for a recent Romanian publication in this field.

18. Nicolae Iorga, “Istoria țării prin cei mici [The country's history through the eyes of the little ones],” *Revista istorică*, 7, 1-3 (1921): 26-62; for similar programmatic studies, see Божидар Райков, “Приписките в системата на българска книжнина [Bozhidar Raikov, *Marginal notes within the system of Bulgarian literature*],” *Palaeobulgarica*, 16, 2 (1992): 38-49; Marieta Adam Chipier, *Vechi însemnări românești ca izvor istoric* [Old Romanian marginal notes as historical sources] (Bucharest: Silex, 1996); Надя Манолова-Николова, “Приписки и



medieval and Ottoman period clearly could not offer: an immediate, unadulterated take on historical reality. With the dearth of alternative sources their importance becomes paramount.

The Bulgarian case seems to be the most striking example of this kind of compensatory logic. Given the paucity of narrative sources for the medieval as well as the Ottoman period,<sup>19</sup> marginal writings have received special attention in Bulgarian historiography, as is extensively documented by the rich literature on the topic with no parallel in any other country of the region.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in ironic contrast to the literal meaning of the word, marginalia have become keystones for basic historical knowledge about entire decades, since they are the only internal narrative source available that may supplement official Ottoman documents or foreign travel accounts. Against the background of particularly scant documentation, the few surviving documents had to make up for an overall deficit and, consequently, were often subject to excessive interpretation and uncontrolled extrapolation that, in a few cases, were even based on literary forgeries.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is noteworthy that marginal sources have oftentimes been invoked as crown witnesses to debates concerning particularly disputed aspects of Bulgarian history of the Ottoman period—based on the belief that marginalia testify to the genius of ordinary Bulgarians resisting the Turkish oppressors.<sup>22</sup>

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микроистория [Nadia Manolova-Nikolova, Marginal notes and microhistory],” *Историческо бъдеще*, 1-2 (1999): 214-225. Раде Михалчић, “Изворна вредност записа и натписа [Rade Mihaljić, The source value of marginal notes and inscriptions],” in idem, *Сабрана дела. V: Изворна вредност старе српске грађе* [Collected works. Vol. V: The source value of Old Serbian material] (Belgrade: Srpska školska knjiga – Knowledge, 2001), 87-105.

19. The source situation is impressively demonstrated by Kiril Petkov, *The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, Seventeenth-Fifteenth Century. The Records of A Bygone Culture* (Leiden et al.: Brill, 2008), comprising virtually all internal sources for nine centuries in one (!) volume. From the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, Ottoman official sources, of course, are of central importance.

20. In addition to the literature on marginalia cited in the two previous footnotes, see Ивана Русева, “Приписки и бележки по нашите писмени паметници [Ivana Ruseva, Annotations and marginal notes according to our written vestiges],” *Известия на Семинара по Славянска Филология при Университета в София*, 4 (1921): 1-48 (also a first attempt at systematisation); Бистра Николова, “Приписката в българската ръкописна книга от X-XIV в. (Проблеми на извороведското им изследване) [Bistra Nikolova, Annotations in Bulgarian manuscript books from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (Problems in source analysis)],” in Кънчо Георгиев, ed., *Помощни исторически дисциплини* [Kâncho Georgiev, ed., Historical auxiliary disciplines], vol. V (Sofia: Akademiya na naukite 1991), 98-112.

21. A case of notorious fame is the so-called “Chronicle of Metodi Draginov,” a short account about an incident of forced conversions to Islam in the Rhodope mountains that, despite being debunked as a counterfeit of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, continues to be cited as a crucial source for the religious and social life of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as was convincingly shown by Иля Тодоров, “Летописният разказ на Методи Драгинов [Иля Todorov, The annalistic account of Metodi Draginov],” *Старобългарска литература*, 16 (1984): 62-75, and Antonina Zhelyazkova, “The Problem of the Authenticity of Some Domestic Sources on the Islamization of the Rhodopes, Deeply Rooted in Bulgarian Historiography,” *Études balkaniques*, 4 (1990): 105-111. For a general debate and other case studies on the uses and abuses of marginalia in Bulgarian historiography, see the excellent collective volume by Христова, Узунова, eds., *Факти и мистификации*.

22. A recent version of this reading is offered in the dissertation by Tatiana Nikolova-Houston, *Margins and Marginality: Marginalia and Colophons in South Slavic Manuscripts*

Yet, rather than discussing the variety of apologetic interests that generally affect the study of pre-modern sources (and are by no means particular to the Bulgarian case),<sup>23</sup> I would like to turn to the underlying and widely undisputed assumption about the spontaneous, sincere, and convention-defying nature of marginal writings. In this sense, from their very first publication marginalia were considered a direct expression of the common people's mind. But can they really be understood as "a mode of human creativity originating from the unmediated experience of the world,"<sup>24</sup> as stated in an introductory note? Is it therefore true that "marginalia definitely reflect the worldviews and perceptions of their creators,"<sup>25</sup> as claimed in a recent article?

Such an understanding of originality, driven by the desire to gain "unmediated" insight into the "worldviews" of ordinary men, is obviously based on a series of misapprehensions. The first one disregards the fact that the activity of taking notes was not at all free from conventions, as is often suggested. While in the case of colophons the existence of conventions is sufficiently demonstrated,<sup>26</sup> one should not neglect that spontaneous notes, seemingly taken without regard for style and form, also followed specific patterns and relied on common formulas of expression. The second misconception lies in the equation of the defiance of norms (e.g. orthographic) with the "honesty" of the act of writing, or inversely, of the respect of norms with a lack of authenticity (which would be the case with any kind of official document written by Ottoman or Church authorities). Yet does the adherence to convention—one may think of a diary entry or of a declaration of love here—render these pieces of writing less authentic? Does it diminish their source value? On the

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during the Ottoman Period, 1393-1878 (Austin: University of Texas, 2008), available to download: <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/3970> (last accessed 01.09.2015). As indicated by the title of her study, Nikolova-Houston tries to make a strong point about the notions of the margin and marginality, suggesting a causal relationship between societal position and form of writing; the evidence, however, is far from cogent. Unfortunately, her somewhat forced interpretation, which lumps together recent theories of subalternity with the traditional narrative of national suffering, diminishes the pertinence of her otherwise impressive study.

23. As the relation of history and memory is subject to a growing number of critical studies, I refrain from citing the exuberant literature, by just pointing *pars pro toto* to the following studies: Rossitsa Gradeva, "Turks and Bulgarians, Fourteenth to Eighteenth Century Centuries," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, Special Issue, 5, 2 (1995), 173-187 (reprinted in Rossitsa Gradeva, *Rumeli under the Ottomans, 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries: Institutions and Communities* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2004), 195-216); Maria Todorova, "Conversion to Islam as a Trope in Bulgarian Historiography, Fiction and Film," in idem, ed., *Balkan Identities. Nation and Memory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 129-157; Евгения Иванова, *Изобретяване на памет и забора: "Падналото царство" и "Последния владетел" в националната памет на сърби и българи* [Evgeniia Ivanova, *Inventing memory and oblivion: "The fallen empire" and "The last rulers" in the national memory of Serbs and Bulgarians*] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Nov Bălgarski Universitet, 2009).

24. Introduction to Момировић, ed., *Стари српски записи*, vol. I, V.

25. Tatiana Nikolova-Houston, "Marginalia and Colophons in Bulgarian Manuscripts and Early Printed Books," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information*, 8 (2009): 65-91, 79.

26. Convincingly demonstrated by Владимир Ћоровић, "Узајамне везе и утицаји код старих словенских записа [Vladimir Ćorović, *Mutual connections and influences in old Slavic marginal notes*]", *Глас Српске краљевске академије*, 176 (1938): 99-170.

contrary, it is precisely the exercise of more or less internalized patterns (which is also a constitutive part of historical reality) that makes them meaningful for historical or linguistic research.

The question of patterns eventually points to the intermediate zone between the positivist approach, which is strictly interested in the informative value of marginalia and widely indifferent to their formative rules, and the Romantic take, which foregoes criticism altogether and hopes to attain the real directly. Although theoretically opposed, both tendencies complement each other inasmuch as they ignore the necessity to examine the specific status of marginalia that is marked by a profound ambivalence; an ambivalence to which the three examples cited at the beginning of this article testify: on the one hand, they are clearly part of the book commenting on its emergence as a physical object; on the other hand, they fill its blank spaces with a large variety of data that clearly transcend the book in content, form, and function. It is this defining liminality blurring the lines between text and context which needs to be further conceptualized.

### III. Taking notes — in search of an interpretive framework

In a sense, the liminal status of marginalia—inside the book, yet pointing outside; having a distinct personal note, yet being subject to conventions—is already reflected in the wavering terminology. Thus, each language shows a confusing variety of terms to denote marginal writings, which, moreover, prove to be barely translatable. In Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian literature, the main terms are *zapis*, *beleška* and *pripiska* and their derivatives, each of them emphasizing a slightly different aspect of writing, oscillating between the indication of the placement of the particular note (Sr. *zapis*, literally *on-scripture*), its function regarding the reference text (Blg. *pripiska*, literally *ad-notation*), or the manner of writing (Bulg. *beleška*, *note* or *minute*) irrespective of the length or placement in relation to another text. The same semantic fluctuation can be observed in other languages as well, i.e. *σημείωμα* (*record*, *note*, literally *signaling*) or *ενθύμηση* (*souvenir*, literally *remembrance*) in Greek or *inseminare* (*annotation*) and *notă* (*note*) in Romanian, to name but a few examples. In addition to these designations, more technical terms such as *marginalia* or *marginal gloss* and their derivatives are also used in some of these languages, meaning any kind of addendum to the main text. This brief survey of the terminology may suffice to show that it is always a specific aspect of writing—brevity or length, material support, placement, relation (if any) to the main text, and cognitive value—that transpires through the term in use, without ever being fully translatable from one language to another.<sup>27</sup>

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27. It is therefore clear that the terms “marginalia” or “marginal notes,” which are used here for reasons of convenience, do not cover all possible aspects of the multitude of texts one can subsume under this notion.

Given this notional diversity, the question arises whether we can trace common features leading to a minimal definition of marginal writing. Apart from the most obvious facts (they are usually autographs, sometimes by the book's writer, but never by its author) such a definition may depart from a series of basic poetological features defining marginal notes. The first feature is their distinct *placement* in relation to the main text; being spatially detached from it, they are at once identifiable as separate entities. In the case of colophons or forewords, however, their visual detachment, marking the non-belonging to the text, is often lacking. Nevertheless, being placed at the beginning or end of a text, as already indicated by the terms themselves, they mark its boundaries (lat. *marginēs*) in the purest possible sense.<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, marginal writings are characterized by their incompleteness, or rather their *openness*. Contrary to the religious texts they usually accompany, which, as canonical texts, are defined by their inviolability, marginal notes are virtually continuable, expandable, and revisable. The above citation of the monk Roman who left his traces throughout the book are a good example in this sense (citation 2). Other examples are offered by long series of historical notes taken over extended periods of time, sometimes centuries, by different hands, thus adding up to veritable chronicles.<sup>29</sup>

Thirdly, virtual continuability goes along with, but is by no means identical to *seriality* as the last defining feature. Seriality designates the obviously sequential mode in which marginal notes are produced, based on specific standards (e.g. the clearly recurrent topics and their arrangement, the formulaic language) that ultimately account for the high degree of repetitiveness.<sup>30</sup> Incidentally, this holds true even for the "wretched Rafail," whose desperate outcry was cited in the introduction (citation 3); the confession of sinfulness and God-forsakenness is a recurrent topic commonly expressed in exactly the same words as used by Rafail. Again, this is not so say that marginalia were not motivated by very personal experiences or needs, nor does it preclude their candour or veracity. Rather, it is precisely because marginal notes induce the feeling that one is confronted with an immediate testimony that one should not succumb to this first impression and let oneself get carried away by the numerous "oh"-s, "woe"-s and "allas"-es.

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28. Incidentally, among all forms of marginal writings (besides glosses on the main text), only these can be considered paratexts according to the definition by Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, transl. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1: "We do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world [...]."

29. See, for example, Стојановић, *Стари српски записи и натписи*, vol. III, 82-131, and vol. VI, 82-89, assembling all notes with a specifically historical content under the title "annalistic notes" (*letopisačke beleške*).

30. For a minute analysis of these formulaic elements see Десислава Иванова, "Елементи на приписката [Desislava Ivanova, Elements of marginal notes]", in Веселин Панайотов, ed., *Маргиналии* [Veselin Panaiotov, Marginalia], vol. I (Shumen: Glauks, 1999): 49-83.

It is safe to claim that the large majority of marginal notes falls into the proposed pattern defined by *detachment, openness, and seriality*. Yet besides these rather formal or technical features, the topical dimension must be examined more closely. Answering questions such as “What did people usually write about?” or “What did they consider noteworthy?” is even more difficult than determining the poetological aspects of marginalia because systematic classifications based on empirical studies were missing until recently.<sup>31</sup> Thanks to two Bulgarian scholars who, independently of one another, have undertaken laborious classifications based on large material samples, we are able to make more than merely impressionistic statements about the nature of marginal notes. While Desislava Ivanova has embarked on a meticulous itemization of “marginal” topics, which she then ranks in order of frequency,<sup>32</sup> Tatiana Nikolova-Houston has taken a more anthropological approach by identifying six thematic clusters that relate to each other like concentric “world”-circles, with the main text of the book at the centre and the sixth clusters (“the world above”) at the outer periphery.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, these two approaches, which have their respective strengths and weaknesses, perfectly complement each other in various respects. They show that what is chosen to be written down in the blank spaces of

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31. For a comprehensive survey of existing classifications see Веселин Панайотов, “Средновековни маргинални текстове [Veselin Panaiotov, Medieval marginal texts],” in Idem, ed., *Маргиналии*, Vol 1., 5-48, and Idem, “Възгледат на Б. Райков за маргиналиите и неговото влияние върху днешните публикации [B. Raikov’s view on marginalia and its influence on contemporary publications],” in *ibid.*, vol. 2 (Shumen: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Episkop Konstantin Preslavski,” 2005), 73-95.

32. Десислава Иванова, “Бележката като маргинален текст в средновековната българска книжнина [Desislava Ivanova, The note as marginal text in medieval Bulgarian literature],” *Преславска книжовна школа*, 3 (1998): 218-232. According to Ivanova, the following thematic clusters may be distinguished in order of frequency: 1) the act of donating and the donor (*kritor*), 2) the production of the book (closely related, of course, to the first category), 3) its purchase, 4) its binding or rebinding, 5) pilgrims or readers mentioning themselves, 6) lists of costs and debts, or calculations with no relation to the book, 7) solicitations for divine mercy, 8) political or military events, 9) becoming a monk, 10) promotion within the Church hierarchy, 11) cases of death, 12) astronomical or natural phenomena, 13) economic calamities, 14) inventories of goods, 15) messages of diverse content to other persons, 16) construction or renovation of churches, or 17) their deterioration or destruction, 18) diseases, 19) various epigrams and thoughts. At the end of her list of topics, Ivanova also includes recurrent stylistic or structuring devices which strictly speaking do not belong to the category of topics, but are part of a different analytical register: 1) opening formulas (such as “let it be known” or the invocation of heavenly assistance), 2) simple prayer formulas, 3) indication of date and time (in varying degrees of specification), 4) imprecations to protect the book from being stolen. It goes without saying that one inscription can include pieces of information belonging to several categories and can show more than one of the stylistic elements mentioned here.

33. According to Nikolova-Houston, *Margins and Marginality*, based on the study of 668 marginalia and 52 colophons on manuscripts and rare books from The Historical and Archival Church Institute in Sofia, the first thematic cluster comprises marginalia and colophons about their “host” book, its production, ownership etc. (“the world of the book”), the second relates to the various forms through which the book and its users interact (“the world within”), the third one comprises notes on Church life in its manifold aspects from donations to repair works (“the world between”), the fourth assembles marginalia about political and social life (“the world outside”), the fifth gathers notes on natural history from plights to astronomical phenomena (“the world around”), and, finally, the sixth presents the people’s wishes and prayers (“the world above”).

books is not just a diffuse mass of arbitrary issues. Rather, as Ivanova shows, there is a specific set of concerns that are considered noteworthy and that are centred on the book to different degrees of priority. Viewed from a more symbolic perspective, embraced by Nikolova-Houston, the notes fill up the transitional zone between the book itself and heavenly mercy, without any clear-cut distinction between the realm of the sacred and the realm of the profane; these “worlds” are deeply entangled. With all this in mind, the survey of marginal topics reveals an undeniable polarity regarding the degree to which their content is related to the book that hosts them. To be more clear, on the one hand we can identify annotations that, in one way or another, are centred on the book itself (its bestowing, binding, relocation, price, owner etc.) as well as on its scribe (his position in the Church hierarchy, the site of his activity, the time it took him to write it, the wishes he expresses etc).<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, there are a significant number of notes that are not related to the book in any way at all, but refer to other topics, such as the impact of the weather on agriculture and prices, the achievements of local governors or of the sultan, or else to the health of the scribe and his relatives. In other words, their relation to their host book appears almost arbitrary; they seem to have been jotted down in a given book only in the absence of alternatives, that is, ultimately, by chance.

By emphasizing this category of seemingly non-content-related annotations, I would like to draw attention to the fact that, besides the aspects of structure and content discussed so far, a third dimension of marginal writing needs to be considered, which, in a way, transcends the level of the text and addresses the book as such, namely, the *book* (and not the text) *as a material host* for the practice of annotating. Addressing this dimension ultimately means inverting our perspective and asking: what function does the book have for the practice of annotating? Or what is the meaning bestowed upon it by its annotator or annotators? As the following dedication from 1636 by a certain Boyo clearly shows, the book is by no means irrelevant or just an interchangeable support to its annotator; quite the contrary, its material value is held in high esteem as an object of awe and veneration serving as a proper mediator of the annotator’s intercessions to the Lord (citation 4):

Let it be known that it was the shepherd Boyo from the village of Hadžar on the Sredna Gora, the kadiluk [the juridical district] of Plovdiv, who bought this book, and gave it to the church, the Temple of the Great Martyr George, so that it may serve the soul of his father, Nedelčo, and the soul of his mother, Mrāza, and her grandmother Golemica, and his grandfather Boyo, his sister Rada, the children Todor and Dena, and to his sweetheart Boya and to the wife Rada, and to Boyo’s father-in-law Peyo, and to Boyo’s mother-in-law Petkana, and to Boyo’s uncle Gerčo Gečo [sic], and to Boyo’s aunts, Rada and Čoina and Rusa, and to his aunt Steo, and his aunt Boža. And he donated it to the Temple of the Great Martyr George for it may be beneficial as long as the village exists, and he gave it into the hands of pop [father, priest] Bono, for him to watch out for it, where it moves about and who takes it and who reads it. And if pop [father, priest]

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34. That is, the first four groups according to Ivanova’s taxonomy or the first two worlds in Nikolova-Houston’s model.

Bono takes it and says “mine is the book”, and takes it to another village and the priest’s child says “I inherited it” or sells it to another one, or if someone steals it—they should be damned by the 318 fathers of [the council of] Nicaea and shall rival Holy George in the cruelty of [their] fate. And if the village disbands, then it [the book] should serve Boyo’s soul and the souls of his family. And whoever reads it should remember and should say: “The Lord may forgive him who bought and him who bestowed it!” Remember, oh Lord ... [illegible] And it was Boyo, who bought it from pop Yovko for exactly 1 000 aspers in the year of 7144 [i.e. 1636].<sup>35</sup>

As we can learn from this dedicatory note, written in Bulgarian vernacular by the priest Yovko, the book (a *Flowery Triodion*, a liturgical book used in the post-Paschal season) was commissioned by Boyo in order to be dedicated to the memory and well-being of his family, whose numerous members are mentioned by name and kinship. Thus, for the obviously illiterate Boyo the book matters as a physical intermediary rather than the particular text(s) within it.

In a similar way, the three examples cited in the introduction to this article also reveal the tendency to use the book as a *pre-text*—in the temporal, spatial, and procedural sense of the word—for the taking of notes. By recording all the things considered noteworthy and memorable, the act of taking notes potentially converts the book into a kind of memorial document, or more precisely into a statement of accounts.

#### IV. Giving account — marginalia and commemoration lists

In order to get a clear understanding of what I will call the accounting function of marginal writings it may be useful to explore the implications of *accounting* by comparing them to a textual genre which is primarily dedicated to pious accounting for the sake of memory—namely the *pomenik*, which roughly translates as commemoration list or beadroll.<sup>36</sup> Going back to late antiquity, the writing of *dypticha* in Greek, or *pomenici* in their more telling Slavonic appellation, were

35. Христова, et al., *Бележки на българските книжовници*, vol. II, no. 288, 47-48: “Да се знае како кѹпи сѹю книгѹ Бойѹ швѹа ѿ сѣлѹ Хацѣрь оу Сръдню горѹ гѹкрилатѣ Пловдискѹи и прѣдаде ю въ цѣрквѹ оу хрѣ стѹго великомѹника Гевѹгѣа да слоужитѣ за очинѹ мѹ дѣшѹ Нѣлѹго и за махѹинѹ мѹ дѣшѹ Мрѣзо и баба негова Голѣмица и дѣда мѹ Бѹиѹ и сѣбра Рада и дѣте Твѣдѹрь и Дѣна и за свою дѣшѹ Бѹю и за гѹрѣжѣе Рада и Бѹиѹвъ тѣстѣ Пѣѹ и тѣща Бѹиѹва Петкана і стрѣка Бѹиѹ Герѹо Герѹо и лѣла Бѹиѹва Рада и Чѹина и Рѣса и вѣлика негѹ Стѣѹ і Бѹжа и приложѣ ю въ хрѣ стѹго великомѹника Гевѹгѣа да слѣжитѣ докле вѣдѣтъ сѣлѹ. и прѣдаде ю попѹ Бѹнѹ на рѣкѹ да ю пѣази и да знае коѹде ходи и кои а зѣма и кои чѣте. аще ли ю оузме гѹ Бѹно и рѣтъ моѹ е книга и занесе на дрѹго сѣлѹ и рѣчѣтъ дѣте поповѹ баѣина нѣ е книга да ю продаде иноѹмѹ или некои да ю оукрадне да ѣ проклѣтъ. ѿ. ТИИ. [318] стѣѹ ѿцѣѹ никѣнскѹи и да мѹ ѣ стѣѹ Гевѹ[гѣе] соѹперникѣ на страшно соѹдище. ами ако се распѣди сѣло а тѣа вѣдѣѹ да сѣжи за Бѹиѹвѹ дѣшѹ и за негово родѹнинѹ и кои чѣтетѣ да поменѣтъ да рѣетѣ бѣ да прѣсти кои коѹпи и кои приложѣ помени гѣи Ст[...].ѹа и коѹпѣ Бѹиѹ ѿ попа Іѹвѣка за рѣ [1000] таманѣ. въ лѣѹ рѣРМѣ [7144 = 1636 AD].”

36. Robert F. Taft, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. Vol. IV. The Diptychs* (Rome: Edizioni Orientalia Christiana, 1991).

meant to record all the benefactors of a given monastery or church, both living and dead. Depending on the status and wealth of a given monastery these listings would also comprise members of the ruling dynasty and of noble families next to high prelates of the Church (according to rank and seniority), followed by a long, virtually ever-expendable list of monks and nuns, of clergymen and laymen (sometimes including their wives and children). Through the recitation of this register prior to Mass (as a part of the *proscomedie*, similar to the Offertory in Latin tradition), these names were immortalised and inscribed into the communal memory.<sup>37</sup>

In the realm of Orthodoxy, there is hardly a better example for showing the interlacing of memory and history than the tradition of commemoration lists.<sup>38</sup> Since the large majority of surviving *pomenici* were copied and continued, if not originally written, between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, they are of exceptional value for the study of cultural memory in this period. Thus, when browsing through the imposing list of names included, for instance, in the beadroll of Krušedol Monastery on the Fruška Gora, or, even more impressively, of Dečani Monastery in Kosovo, the geographical reach of their sphere of influence becomes visible, covering large parts of Southeast Europe, from Buda to Mount Athos, from Bosnia to Wallachia.<sup>39</sup> Here

37. Remarkably enough, although a substantial number of *pomenitsi* have been edited since the pioneering study by Стојан Новаковић (“Српски поменици XV- XVIII века” [Stojan Novaković, Serbian *pomeniks*, 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries], *Гласник Српскога Ученог Друштва*, 42 (1875):1-152), no comprehensive research on them exists. For a good overview on see, Ђорђе Трифуновић, *Азбучник српских средњовековних књижевних појмова* [Đorđe Trifunović, Glossary of Medieval Serbian Literary Terms] (Belgrade: Nolit, 1990), 261-264, and Драгољуб Даниловић, “Стари српски поменици [Dragoljub Danilović, Old Serbian *pomeniks*]”, *Старине Косова и Метохије*, 10 (1997): 37-48, summing up his unpublished doctoral thesis (Belgrade, 1994) by offering a very useful classification of the surviving or attested (in case of loss) *pomenitsi*. To my knowledge there is no comparable inventory for those parts of today’s Bulgaria and Macedonia that were not part of the Patriarchate of Peć, but under the direct jurisdiction of Patriarchate of Constantinople. For Bulgaria and Macedonia, see Иванка Гергова, *Поменици от Македонија в български сборки* [Ivanka Gergova, *Pomeniks from Macedonia in Bulgarian collections*] (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo Prof. Marin Drinov, 2006): 11-15.

38. Surprisingly, this type of source has hardly been analyzed in the post-byzantine context so far. As an exception, see Paolo Odorico, “Le prix du ciel: donations et donateurs à Serrès (Macédoine) au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Balkanica*, 27 (1996): 21-44. Also, the Russian case offers a series of striking parallels. See, among others, Ludwig Steindorff, *Memoria in Altrußland: Untersuchungen zu den Formen christlicher Totensorge* (Stuttgart: Steiner 1994); idem, “Memorial Practice as Means of Integrating the Muscovite State,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 55 (2007): 517-533; idem, “Donations and Commemorations in the Muscovite Realm— a Medieval or Early Modern Phenomenon,” in idem, ed., *Religion and Integration im Moskauer Russland. Konzepte und Praktiken, Potentiale und Grenzen. 14.-17. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 477-498; Russell Martin, “Gifts and Commemoration: Donations to Monasteries, Dynastic Legitimacy, and Remembering the Royal Dead in Muscovy (7159/1651),” in *ibid.*, 499-526. For the general understanding of related genres, see Karl Schmid and Joachim Wollasch, eds., *Memoria. Der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1984); Otto Gerhard Oexle, “Die Gegenwart der Lebenden und der Toten. Gedanken über Memoria,” in Karl Schmid, ed., *Gedächtnis, das Gemeinschaft stiftet* (Munich, Zurich: Schnell & Steiner, 1985), 74-107.

39. For the Krušedol *pomenik*, kept in the Municipal Library of Turnu Severin (Romania), see the facsimile edition by Миле Томић, Мирча Војкулеску, eds., *Поменик манастира Крушедола* [Mile Tomić, Mircha Vojkulesku, eds., *The pomenik of Krušedol Monastery*]



we find not only the names of Serbian and Wallachian rulers and noblemen of the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, but also a large number of clerics and laymen from subsequent decades who were continuously catalogued—up to 1595 in the Dečani *pomenik* and 1688 in the case of the Krušedol *pomenik*. Through reading out loud these long lists of names, the spatial and temporal dimensions of the community were repeatedly recreated in the minds of the pious audience. The key notion of *pomen*, the Slavonic equivalent to the Latin *memoria*, was hereby understood both as the procedure of commemorating and as its result, i.e. a repository of names testifying to a community's legitimate presence before God.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, from a functional point of view, a *pomenik* is used like an account book, albeit in a markedly religious sense, as referring to the duty of “giving account,” so prominently championed in the New Testament (e.g. Romans 14:12, 2, Corinthians 5:10, Matthew 12:36). Paying heed to the call to give account can thus be identified as the underlying moral incentive in marginal writing too. One need only think of the ever recurring formulas “da se zna(e)” or “da se vëšte” (“Let it be known,” “Thou shalt know”), indicating the desire to inscribe oneself within God-given time and to give account of one's own life “well-pleasing unto God” (Romans 12:1, 14:18, 2 Corinthians 5:9 and passim). As indicated by the repeated use of such annunciatory formulas, the individual concern for “giving account” is the central driving force behind the taking of notes.

Both commemoration lists and marginal notes are thus born of the same writing ethos. However, there is a significant difference in the way that the multi-layered notion of accounting has to be understood in each case. While *pomenitsi* have the outer appearance of schedules, consisting primarily of long listings, marginal notes tend to be more explicit, as they not only combine diverse topics but verbalise them and turn them into meaningful microplots. Such emplotment, of course, is completely absent in commemoration lists that juxtapose rather than link elements, thus offering an example of pure seriality and repetitiveness. In contrast to the kind of inventorial account presented by commemoration lists, marginal notes can be considered as accounts in the narrative sense of the word, since here, as all the cited examples

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(Belgrade: Srpska Akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1996). Unfortunately, the digitized *pomenik* of Dečani, available until 2013, has been taken off the internet by the National Library of Serbia. Compare, by way of a substitute, its exhaustive description in Мирослава Гроздановић-Пајић, Радоман Станковић, eds., Опис јужнословенских цirilских рукописа. vol. IV, 1: *Рукописне књиге Манастира Високи Дечани* [Miroslava Grozdanović-Pajić, Radoman Stanković, eds., Catalogue of Cyrillic manuscripts from Yugoslavia. vol. IV, 1: Manuscript books of Visoki Dečani monastery] (Belgrade: Narodna biblioteka Srbije), 451–455, as well as the editors' foreword.

40. In medieval Slavonic, the concept of *pomen* (a derivative from *pamet*) denotes both the commemoration of the dead (and the according service, the requiem mass) and the donation in honour of their memory. Probably, it was even levied on a regular basis by Church authorities; see Сима Ћирковић, Раде Михаљчић, eds., Лексикон српског средњег века [Sima Ćirković, Rade Mihaljević, eds., Dictionary of the Serbian Middle Ages] (Belgrade: Knowledge, 1999), 550–551. Interestingly enough, this double meaning of memory donation is preserved only in the Romanian *pomană*. As for the *pomenik*, it is not without interest in this context to remark that modern Bulgarian and Macedonian preserve the secularized, purely operational meaning, with *pomenik* denoting just a register or a list of names.

show, one can find forms of personal narrations, however rudimentary they may be (see citation 3). However, in some cases the line between those two forms of giving account is less clear cut than it might seem, for not only are there occasionally more explicit passages in *pomenitsi* but also in many cases marginal writings are themselves nothing more than bare listings of names, numbers etc. Eventually, in the case of annalistic notes—enumerating, rather than narrating historic events—we may even say that they are located in a transitional space between these two modes of giving account: on the threshold between counting and accounting.<sup>41</sup>

By way of comparison with memorial books we can now gauge the specific liminality of the practice of taking notes, which from the modern perspective makes it so difficult to get an interpretive hold on them. It becomes clear that the sometimes surprising moments of self-narration—surprising because we have no comparable glimpses of subjectivity in the South Slavic written culture in the period we are concerned with here<sup>42</sup>—can be fathomed only if understood in the context of memorial writing so deeply enrooted in Orthodox piety. Genealogically and functionally speaking, the practice of taking marginal notes marks the transition from enumeration to rudimentary forms of self-narration or from memorial to historical writing.

## V. The 17<sup>th</sup> century—a view from the margins of written culture

As the comparative discussion of commemoration lists has shown, the practice of annotating has to be viewed as part of a culture in which the uses of writing were inextricably linked to the practice of religion. Along with an overall reduced level of literacy, the persistent religious imprint of writing has proved to be a serious obstacle to historians of Southeast Europe trying to get a more refined view of the political, economic, or social realities of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>43</sup> While the period is addressed quite differently, even controversially in the various disciplines of historical research—with crisis and change being the most common denominators, as it seems—, regional histories of culture widely agree on the generally low profile of the century. Standard overviews, whether written in Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian,

41. An exemplary collection of such kind of notes expanding into short chronicles is provided by Peter Schreiner (ed.), *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, 3 vols. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1975-1979) (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 12, 1-12, 3. Series Vindobonensis). On the transitional forms of writing placed in-between these two poles, see the elementary study by Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 71-109.

42. On the possibilities and limits of interpretation of first person narratives, see the afterword to the anthology by Радмила Маринковић, ed., *Писах и потписах: аутобиографске изјаве средњег века* [Radmila Marinković, ed., I wrote and I signed it: autobiographical statements of the Middle Ages] (Belgrade: Nolit, 1996), 239 f.

43. Here, of course, I disregard Ottoman-Turkish documents produced by judicial or fiscal authorities. Examples of pragmatic literacy in Balkan languages are very rare and confined to church documents and, to a far lesser degree, to economic transactions with the large majority of them in Greek.

Serbian, or Romanian, usually relegate the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the prolonged Middle Ages. This again is based on arguments of stylistic continuity in literature and the decorative arts under the unbroken guidance of the Church as well as on the absence of cultural dynamics, of the spread of literacy, of genre diversification, of book printing etc.

And it is indeed hard to deny that, in terms of literary production, only very few original pieces were created in South Slavic idioms throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>44</sup>. According to recent estimates in Central and Western Bulgaria, 85% of the manuscripts were created for liturgical purposes, and even the remaining 15% were, for the most part, collections of religious texts, biblical or apocryphal in their origin, besides very few grammar books. Judging from the surviving texts, other secular genres, chronicles for example, are completely lacking in this period.<sup>45</sup> For the Western parts of the Slavic speaking Balkans, which were under the jurisdiction of the Peć Patriarchate, the picture looks slightly different, since manuscript production seems to have been both more prolific and more diversified in content and form there.<sup>46</sup>

However, while specifically liturgical or generally religious subjects dominated book production almost exclusively throughout the century (and well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century), a closer look at the details reveals indications of change which, due to their contradictory appearance, are hardly perceptible. Thus, on the one hand, there are considerable efforts to reinforce the religious fundamentals through the politics of copying and compiling the textual tradition and to amend it where considered necessary (the writing/scribal school of the Etropole region as well as the manuscript copying initiative by patriarch Pajsije I of Peć are probably the two best known examples of such kind).<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, parallel to this trend of renewal in the spirit of conservation,<sup>48</sup> the vernacular language started to be

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44. Cf. Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Bulgarians in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century: Slavic Orthodox Society and Culture under Ottoman Rule* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1993); Dilyana Radoslavova, "The Repertoire of Bulgarian Manuscripts from the Seventeenth Century," *Solanus*, 23 (2013): 169-187; Idem, "Граничният седемнадесети век. Българската православна книжнина — феноменът от периферията" [The 17<sup>th</sup> century as a transitional period. Bulgarian Orthodox literature—a phenomenon from the periphery], in Рая Кунчева, ed., *Маргиналното в/на литература* [Raia Kuncheva, ed., *Marginality in/of Literature*] (Sofia: Izdatelski centar "Boyan Penev", 2012), 208-232.

45. Radoslavova, "The Repertoire of Bulgarian Manuscripts", 176.

46. Cf. Татјана Суботин-Голубовић, *Српско рукописно наслеђе од 1557. године до средине XVII века* [Tatjana Subotin-Golubović, *The Serbian manuscript legacy from 1557 to the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century*] (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1999).

47. On Etropole, see: Боруана Христова, Елисавета Мусакова, *Етрополската калиграфско-художествена школа от XVII век* [Boriana Khristova, Elisaveta Musakova, *The calligraphic-artistic school of Etropole of the 17<sup>th</sup> century*] (Sofia: Borina, 2010); Елисавета Мусакова, ed., *Етрополската книжовна школа и българският XVII век* [Elisaveta Musakova, *The Etropole literary school and the Bulgarian 17<sup>th</sup> century*] (Sofia: Natsionalna biblioteka "Sv.Sv. Kiril i Metodii, 2011). On Pajsije's achievements, see Томислав Јовановић, *Књижевно дело патријарха Пајцеја* [Tomislav Jovanović, *The Literary Works of Patriarch Pajsije*] (Belgrade: Sveti arhijerejski sinod Srpske pravoslavne crkve, 2001).

48. See on this point Radoslavova, "The Repertoire of Bulgarian Manuscripts", as well as my own case study patriarch of Peć, Pajsije I. See, Konrad Petrovszky, "Time, Memory, and the

used extensively for the writing of less canonical texts aimed at popularizing religious beliefs, such as the *damaskini* literature in the Bulgarian case.<sup>49</sup> Taken all together, it seems appropriate to speak of a slowly evolving, yet still predominantly religious written culture.

Within this framework, a turn to the marginal forms of writing may corroborate these findings and capture additional aspects of cultural expression that are mostly invisible in its conventional forms. Although the very notion of ‘marginalia’ suggests otherwise, these texts have to be considered as central resources for historical study. This is not only the case because they make up for a general lack of narrative resources in the Slavic parts of Southeast Europe, but also because the study of their structure, motifs, and content sheds new light on such issues as the use of writing and language, the perception of time and space through the data recorded, as well as the self-presentation of the writers, to name but a few potential fields of research that are yet to be exploited.<sup>50</sup> Yet using them in more systematic manner—rather than as “fragmentary clues” or “pebbles” in a vast sea of possible meanings, as stated by the two mottoes to this article—requires a more thorough consideration of their status and specific source value. Against a still prevalent romanticising approach, I have suggested that the writing of marginalia has to be conceived as a practice of writing fully situated *within* the limits of contemporary religious culture and the corresponding uses of writing.<sup>51</sup>

Viewed against this background, looking at the margins and through the margins might reveal aspects and tendencies of gradual cultural change otherwise hardly perceptible. Thanks to the various available editions, for the whole period from the late 15<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, we can firstly observe how margins increasingly serve as a place for historical and self-narratives, thus supplementing in a way the absence of other corresponding literary forms. In sheer numeric terms, the 17<sup>th</sup> century witnesses an unprecedented increase, with twice as many marginalia as the 16<sup>th</sup> century (if we take the edition by Ljubomir Stojanović, still the most comprehensive on, as the point of reference).

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Creation of Local Tradition in the First Half of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century: The Case of Pajsije I of Peć,” in Radu G. Păun, ed., *Histoire, mémoire et dévotion: Regards croisés sur la construction des identités dans le monde orthodoxe aux époques byzantine et post-byzantine* (Seyssel: La Pomme d’Or, 2016), 345–364. See also the contribution by Dilyana Radoslavova in the present volume.

49. Initially a collection of sermons by the learned Greek Damaskinos Stoudites that, after being translated into Bulgarian, was extensively copied and modified in many ways. Signifying rather a generic title than an established text, the *damaskin* became the most popular reading and didactic book up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the extensive literature, see Донка Петканова-Тотева, *Дамаскините в българската литература* [Donka Petkanova-Toteva, *The Damaskins in Bulgarian literature*] (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bălgarskata Akademiia na Naukite, 1965); Olga Mladenova, “On Damaskin genealogy,” *Linguistique balkanique*, 2 (2006): 233–246.

50. On the use of marginalia for research in these fields, see the literature cited in notes 12 to 17.

51. For a fundamental take on marginality in the context of literary genre and genre evolution, see Anisava Miltenova, “Marginality, Intertextuality, Paratextuality in Medieval Bulgarian Literature,” in: Кунчева, ed., *Маргинално*, 208–232.

Notwithstanding the uncertainties of such estimates, this leap is still significant.<sup>52</sup> These observations, tentative as they may be, on the evolution of the writing of marginalia can moreover be correlated with data about the social background of the scribes in order to get a more vivid picture as far as the extension of writing activity is concerned. In striking contrast to the previous century, writers of 17<sup>th</sup> century marginalia reveal an increasingly non-monastic, secular background (which, of course, does not mean that the religious context lost its dominance).<sup>53</sup> Supplementing these findings with other data yielded by marginal notes we also witness a rise of secular sponsorship (of book acquisition, copying, binding etc.) throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>54</sup>

If we were to locate the evidence provided by marginalia in a larger regional perspective including the Greek and Romanian-speaking areas of Southeast Europe, we can finally state that the medium of writing was generally used more extensively throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The increase in writing activity was certainly promoted by the trend towards the use of vernacular language in the whole region—probably the most wide-ranging development in the cultural field.<sup>55</sup> While the vernacularizing trend, as modest as it was in European comparison, can be discerned more clearly in the non-Slavic parts of the regions, the Slavic-speaking lands south of the Danube were also part of this development. Here too it was the growing inclusion of the vernacular into the ambit of writing that allowed for the communication of a variety of personal experiences hitherto barely articulated; a development almost impossible to trace without considering marginalia. Dwelling on a rather elusive genre of source material like the marginal note therefore reveals the discreet dynamism of the written culture of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the peripheral shifting of conventional boundaries.<sup>56</sup>

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52. Considering only the entries that can be dated more or less precisely, we have 2.085 annotations (and inscriptions) from the 17<sup>th</sup> compared to 833 for the 16<sup>th</sup> century collected in Стојановић, ed., *Стари српски записи и намписи*. A similar tendency, although not as clear, is confirmed for the Eastern part of the Slavic speaking Balkans not covered by the Stojanović collection. For the 16<sup>th</sup> century there is also, of course, a significant rise compared to the preceding centuries, but here the reduced number of preserved manuscripts renders estimates less reliable.

53. For a detailed analysis of social status based on the profile of marginal writings, see Радославова, “Състав на българските книжовници преписвачи.”

54. According to Nikolova-Houston, *Margins and Marginality*, 142, 164, 195, 409.

55. For a discussion of the evidence, see Konrad Petrovszky, *Geschichte schreiben im osmanischen Südosteuropa. Eine Kulturgeschichte orthodoxer Historiographie des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), 86–101.

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